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SUBJECT: ABIDJAN'S STRUGGLE TO CONTROL GARBAGE SITUATION

REFLECTS DETERIORATION OF FORMERLY GOOD PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE

REF: 2006 ABIDJAN 1004

¶1. (U) After more than four weeks, on January 25th, Prime Minister Banny brokered an agreement with community groups located near Abidjan's municipal dump at Akouedo, permitting the resumption of discharge of the city's waste stream. Prior to this breakthrough, the city had become increasingly fouled by rotting mounds of garbage at nearly every intersection and along every major road; a situation made worse by the noxious clouds of smoke hanging over much of the city emanating from residents' ad hoc efforts at incineration. Traffic flow was severely affected at certain chokepoints and no small number of traffic accidents were ascribed to the combined effects of thick smoke with narrowed passages.

¶2. (SBU) In the wake of the agreement to reopen the 150-hectare Akouedo landfill, efforts could be seen all over the city removing the mounds of refuse. On February 2, EconOff visited the Director of Abidjan District's Direction of Environment and Public Hygiene, technocrat Moyabi KONE to get a sense of how the operation is going. Kone explained that Akouedo, in operation since 1965, should be closed because of the proximity of nearby settlements, and that a city of Abidjan's size should have at least three discharge points rather than one. The accumulating trash had scandalized the country's elite and occasioned dire commentary from the press, but according to Kone, had not resulted in a feared-cholera or other public health crisis. Long-term, Kone's office would like to see Akouedo closed and another center opened; a new site has been selected and an Italian company had placed a \$26 million bid to construct, operate and eventually turn over the facility to the government (complete with modern impermeable lining to prevent groundwater contamination). Kone indicated, however, that final approval for the project has been held up at the ministerial level for the past two years.

¶3. (U) Kone explained that Abidjan's refuse is not well-suited for incineration, as is often suggested as a means of addressing Akouedo's inadequacies. The composition of trash is too humid to allow efficient burning. Similarly, modern techniques in use to boost landfill lifespans in the West, such as injection of oxygen, would not result in meaningful improvement given that tropical temperatures here already promote rapid biodegradation. Kone lamented the utter lack of trash separation and recycling, which considerably boosts volumes ending up in Akouedo. Pointing to the tendency of rich sections of town to generate up to 1.5 kg per person of trash daily combined with the sharp increase in the city's population since the country was divided in 2002 (up to 6 million from 4.5), Kone said Akouedo, even fully reopened, is not a viable solution for the long term.

¶4. (SBU) Kone arranged for EconOff and LES to visit Akouedo.

The computerized operation was surprisingly efficient. A virtual parade of trucks was arriving every two minutes, brimming with collected garbage to be rapidly weighed and dispatched to the current discharge site. The private companies bill the government CFA 6000 (USD 12) per ton (with the average truck bringing in 22 tons of trash), and the Akouedo operation's billing system appeared to accurately track inflow and accounts payable. The discharge site, 1 km past the site of the most egregious toxic waste dumping (reftel), is a beehive of activity. Two large tractors push the trash into a manageable form, where it is instantly attacked by perhaps 75-100 well-practiced garbage salvagers (both Ivorians and so-called "foreigners") who search for plastic bags, cans, glass bottles and other reusables to sell.

15. (SBU) Comment. The garbage system, and its problems, are emblematic of Cote d'Ivoire's long-term malaise. The infrastructure, while old and fraying, is still in remarkably good shape. But the lack of investment shows. Perhaps most tellingly, public outrage over the prolonged accumulation of garbage in the streets was muted. While even the very wealthy and powerful were affected (the Ambassador's street hosted a particularly ugly trash pile), no organized response was evident. Perhaps this gradual acceptance of diminished circumstances is the worst result of the ongoing crisis. End Comment.
Hooks